



# PHANTOM APA





PHANTOM-APA ISSUE #5

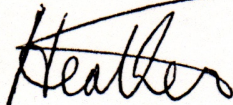
FEBRUARY 1992

Hello again. Yes, Phantom-Apa is late again and I had so wanted to get 1992 off to an on-time start. Oh well, the best laid plans and all. But in a way it's a good thing issue #5 is late because I've just gotten some late breaking news. See my section for all the details!

Remember back to the 1st issue of Phantom-Apa. I left open the possibility of adjusting the publishing schedule for the apa as well as letting the co-OE (Official Editor) Carol Smith do some issues. The publishing schedule will definitely be changed within the next few issues and Carol is seriously considering doing some of the upcoming issues.

On the subject of publishing schedule change. My time is getting more and more crowded. There is regular mundane work and I'm also in charge of a monthly newsletter for the local science fiction group. I've just been put on the board of the sf group. I love doing the apa but this is the second time it's been late and that 's not good. I'm considering moving to a quarterly schedule rather than every two months. Please give some feedback on this matter. Feel free to call me at (804) 741-5384. Help me in deciding which month within a quarter would be good for everyone. Should the deadline be on the 1st or on the 15th of the month. If there is no feedback I'll make the decision on my own.

On a more upbeat note, there have been more inquiries from people about Phantom-Apa. That's all for now. Remeber to send in your submissions for the April issue by April 4th.



Heather



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*Heather*



The Phantom of Richmond  
Phantom-Apa Issue #5  
February 1992

Greetings all,

Here is the late breaking news from the lair of the Phantom via his producers, Cameron MacIntosh and the Really Useful Theatre Group. The 2nd U.S. National Touring Company of Phantom of the Opera is a go! The was a small piece in the February 27th Los Angeles Times saying that Phantom would be at the Orange County Performing Arts Center in July 1994. The March 2nd issue of Weekly Variety had an article in the legitimate theater section with all the details.

What information we've gotten previously has been basically correct. Unfortunately there are no dates given with the list of cities nor the order of the cities beyond a few details.

The 2nd touring company will begin playing in December 1992 in Seattle at the 5th Avenue Theater. The minimum that "Phnatom" will play in any one city will be 4 weeks. I suspect the show will stay for longer in many cities. The tour will last three years and play 20 cities. According to Alan Wasser, tour general manager, who is quoted in the Variety article. "The 2nd company is reconfigured to fit slightly smaller theaters in mid-sized cities. The new tour is designed for shallow stages and is configured for a stage depth of 32 feet. Theaters will also require installation of steel structural supports for the action above the proscenium. (The steel supports are probably for the chandelier which even though it's made of plastic weighs 3/4 of a ton.) The Seattle site was chosen as the launch of the 2nd tour because the theater is the most physically restrictive of the entire tour."

Here is a list of the cities:

Seattle - December 1992

Atlanta

Cincinnati

Cleveland

Columbus

Costa Mesa, CA - I think this is the Orange Co. Center - July 1994

Dallas

Denver

Houston

Kansas City

Louisville

Miami Bech

Nashville

Phoenix

Pittsburgh

Portland, Oregon

St Louis

St. Paul/Minneapolis - in issue #4 I mentioned the man from this area who had gotten a mailing about Phantom from the Ordway Theater with a start in April 1993 for 3 months - this could change but the Ordway would be in a lot of trouble?

Tampa/St. Petersburg, FL



Washington, D.C.

The 2nd tour will cost \$10 million to mount. I expect there will be duplicates of many of the set pieces and drapes so that they can leapfrog to each city. How that works is this way. The 1st tour started in Chicago and then went to Ft. Lauderdale. The second set of large set pieces went to Florida. When Chicago closed that group of pieces were stored for a little while and then taken to Washington, D.C. The pieces in Ft. Lauderdale went on to Atlanta. "Phantom" takes 3 to 4 weeks to be put into any one theater, takes 28 tractor trailers to move everything and costs at least \$1 million each time there is a move to a different city.

The 1st National "Phantom" tour had the 1st night of previews in Philadelphia on February 11, 1992. The show will be in Philly for 5 months. The Forest Theater is only selling tickets to the end of May 1992 but there will be an extension to the end of July, beginning of August. The company then moves to the Wang Center in Boston. Boston is the final city for this leg of the 1st company. The Variety article said that the 1st company would continue touring but didn't mention any cities it would be playing.

That is all the news that I have for right now so I'll move on to some mailing comments from last issue.

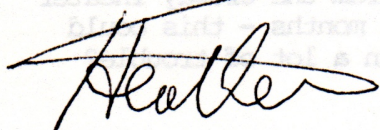
Theresa Ward: Erik has such passion and love for Christine. It is A Grand Passion. Many people in life long for even a smidgen of what Erik feels and never find it. I'm a romantic also and wish to find and experience passion on such a scale but the cynic in me doesn't believe it will happen. I wouldn't care what the guy looked like! So Erik has a problem with his face. So what!

Carol: Go ahead and show the sister the article from the 1st issue. I assume you're referring to the dangerous male article? So Michael Crawford's voice does strange things to you, heh? I must admit that when he's singing as the Phantom I've been known to get the shivers in certain places. Ah, yes.

John Flynn: Your Phantom Dispatch was excellent. The true power of the ALW Phantom as well as other incarnations comes from that tapping into the mythic vein of beauty = goodness and ugliness = evil which we got from the ancient Greeks. When a person sees the ALW "Phantom" he/she knows intellectually that we shouldn't be repelled by the Phantom's unmasked face but on a gut, instinctive level we are repulsed. The audience is made to think on the contradictions of these two reactions and in many cases members of the audience are moved to tears for the Phantom at the end of the musical and that is both men and women. The Alw version also has the driving power source of sexuality. Repressed sexuality on both the Phantom's and Christine's part. This tension also pervades the musical.

Janice: I get to see the Canadian touring company in early May in Ottawa. I'm looking forward to seeing Jeff Hyslop, Patti Cohenour and company after reading your submission.

That's all from me. Talk to you all next issue.





# JAYNE MERSENHASEN

157 BRINKMAN STREET

BUFFALO, NEW YORK 14211

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This won't be a long entry because report cards and a graduate course paper are keeping me VERY busy right now.

Graeme Campbell, the "voice" on the Canadian PHANTOM radio and television commercials and a friend, died of stomach cancer the middle of January. He was currently playing the innkeeper in LES MIZ at the Royal Alexandra Theatre in Toronto. He will be greatly missed by us all.

On a happier note, Jayne Lewis, Madam Giry with the Canadian Touring production, will soon be doing that role in Toronto. We are really excited about being able to see her more often now that she is not roaming about Canada.

Looking forward to the Toronto PHANTOM Weekend at the end of February. Lois Jolson has lots planned, including video presentations of things Colm Wilkinson has done in Europe. We have great seats for the Saturday matinee and are looking forward to spending time with friends and making some new ones. I'll tell you all about it in the next APA.

Had a great Christmas vacation; got the PHANTOM doll as a gift. Went to NYC, but did not see PHANTOM. We're going to Philadelphia in April to see Kevin Gray and the U.S. Touring Company.

THE MUSIC OF ANDREW LLOYD WEBER with Michael Crawford came to the Shea's Theatre in Buffalo, New York for performances January 14th - 19th. When this was announced the previous August, we purchased tickets for EVERY PERFORMANCE at that time, aside from our regular subscription seats.

The box office personnel were amazed. They didn't quite believe that this show had the potential to do so well. Hah! At that time, the precise number of shows and actual schedule for MC was not quite yet known. Having access to the MCIFA Hot-Line number, we were able to advise them in advance when we knew. This they found a little unnerving, too. Still, the tickets we eventually got this far in advance were not as good as those ordered by other out-of-town members later.

We began scouring the papers and TV schedules the weekend prior to the Tuesday opening, and discovered that MC would be interviewed on various local radio and TV shows. The late afternoon radio interview was pre-taped, so MC would not be at the station. At the local morning show, he answered questions from the audience and received a white chocolate mask on a dark chocolate board from a local chocolatier. Of course, since Michael had made a nasty Buffalo weather joke several months previous in Florida, 15 minutes after his first Buffalo interview, the skies opened up and the temperature dropped from 52 degrees to 20 degrees. The wind-chill factor dropped, too, and bitter winds blew through downtown the rest of the week and weekend!!!

Opening night, we sent back an early birthday present - a pair of PHANTOM logo mask cuff-links, and a card. Just before the curtain, the sponsor of the opening night series



at Shea's announced that tonight was a sell-out - 3233 seats. Having attended all the other opening nights of the Shea's series, we knew that this was the first sell-out of the season, and it went on to be the only show so far this year to sell-out EVERY PERFORMANCE! We had seen this tour twice before: the previous July with Michael in Cleveland, and before that in Washington without Michael. In Buffalo, not only was there a background slide with the Tour Logo and MC's name, but there were logo slides for ALL of the show, except for ASPECTS and SONG & DANCE. Also, for MOTN the entire background was filled with a starry diorama. Of course, the company and MC were excellent!

I had different companions for the Wednesday, Thursday and Friday performances, and everyone thoroughly enjoyed themselves. Small presents and cards were sent back each night, but MC was hard to find, because he took an exit other than the stage door. By the end of the week many of the California people had arrived for the BIG WEEKEND. In spite of last-minute phone calls, they were still a bit unprepared for the severity of the Buffalo weather.

At the Saturday matinee, before the encores, shouts of HAPPY BIRTHDAY disrupted Michael's concentration, and he missed his Chuck Berry line.

At the evening performance, the audience started to sing HAPPY BIRTHDAY before the encores, to which Michael sheepishly joked that it really was in July!

On Sunday, we arrived at the Hyatt for the Banquet/Party, to see many women in purple, and a few other guys. Upon checking in and receiving name badges, we drew a table number, and got the table right in front of the stage where MC would later appear! Once we were seated, Glynnis Fuller, the President, took the stage and explained what would be happening, and repeated the request that NO FLASHES be used. Then they began the auction. The items ranged from autographed lobby cards and posters to artwork and apparel - the highest sale was in the \$800.00 or so range. Near the end of the meal, she again took the stage and asked that all of the Local MCIFA members raise their hands and be identified.

A few minutes later, the 5 local members were taken from the room and had a group photo taken with MC before his entrance to the party. We all clustered around MC while the News photographer snapped away; when he asked our names for the caption, Michael started spelling C-R-A-W-F-O-R-D. Unfortunately, the photo has not yet run in the Buffalo News, and until it does, we cannot buy any copies from them.

Afterwards, Michael made his entrance to thunderous applause. On the stage, he and Glynnis sat down with microphones. She thanked him for taking time before his vocal warm-up to join us, and then introduced a special commemorative video the club had assembled to chronicle his career. Michael laughed with embarrassment at many of the clips, and remarked that at least one had never been aired or released. After the retrospective, they ran a small clip of his two daughters reminiscing, which really brought the



tears to his eyes. Then they presented him with his present - a knife to cut a cake in the shape of a check for the Sick Children's Trust, in the amount of \$50,000.00!! He almost dropped the knife! We were taking pictures from our vantage point, and using several people's cameras for those behind us. After a teary goodbye, MC left for the final matinee, and the luncheon broke-up as well.

The show was sold-out, of course, and phenomenal. After the final encore, a huge cake was wheeled out, and the conductor led everyone in a rousing chorus of HAPPY BIRTHDAY. After Michael blew out the candles, he peeked under the cart to see if there was a girl there, and then hurriedly rolled the cake off-stage and waved a final good-bye, after thanking everyone and wishing the Buffalo Bills luck in the Super Bowl. He said that he had planned to make some sort of speech, but couldn't think of anything to say.

Since many were staying over Sunday night and NOT attending the evening show, because Michael had left for Florida, we planned a small gathering at my house to watch videos, sell video prints, and just unwind. Gayle Lynne helped distribute flyers, and we went to pick-up everyone at the Hyatt lobby just as it started snowing again. Before we left, an advance copy of the video of MC singing "Only You" was shown in the hotel bar video system; this is available to the video networks - we were advised to call VH-1 and the Juke Box Channel and ask for it!

So ended the week of MC in Buffalo.

That's all for now. Hopefully, I'll have more for the April issue.



103 Godwin Avenue  
Midland Park, NJ 07432-1318  
201-652-0534  
Feb. 1, 1992

The Phantom of Midland Park:

Fondest Greetings To You All,

Is it February **already**--I completely forgot about the APA! I guess time flies, whether you have fun or not! Well, the 'zine reviews will have to wait until the next issue. I'll just have time to type this up and take it to Staples to be copied, and then Express Mail it to Heather. So it's just some comments for this issue.

Janice: Since I have seen only a few Eriks, Christines, etc. I really cannot comment on your perfect PTO cast. (I do hope to see Colm before he leaves the Toronto show.) Isn't it great that there are so many variations on these characters for all to see in these productions

Peter Karrie sounds **very** interesting. Jeff Hyslop has better diction than Michael Crawford? **WOW!** I do hope to see you and Larry again soon!

Teresa: I think that Angelamarie's PTO list could probably go on forever--or at least as long as the show deserves to run!!!

Another Chieftains fan! **YAY!** Have you ever seen them perform live. I have, way, **way**, back in college. They were superb and spell-binding. do you have the two tapes they did with James Galway? Excellent stuff!

I have heard lots of great stuff about Dave Willets too. What a pity that he can't come over to NYC for a while. I think it's perfect when the Phantom catches Christine when she faints, instead of letting her drop to the floor--**KLUNK!**

John: I loved your submission to the APA. You really explained **why** this story so fascinates people and will continue to do so for as long as people read the book or see one of the other adaptations. By the way, there is another comic book version coming out soon. I believe it's from Inovation Press.. Thank you for writing it.

Heather: I can't believe that it's a year since the APA started, either. It's great to see the APA slowly grow, as it's fun to see the show go all over the place and win more fans wherever it goes. As John's article shows, it really taps into something , a longing for something deeper, something with more substance. Sadly, too few of the critics see or even care to see what the show really is talking



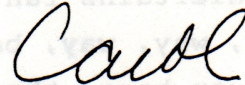
about. But then, "no one ever built a statue to a critic." Heaven only knows how wrong-headed most of them are!

Thank you for liking my story. I tried to do something a little different, and I hope to have something for MASK#3 that is a bit different than "Erik and Christine do wind up together after all." I like doing different things--it's okay as long as I keep it plausible and don't bend the characters out of shape. To me, that makes it more my own story, and not so much like I'm borrowing these characters for a quick spin. But, then again, as George Carlin says--"If you are going out for a spin? -----"

By the way, Heather, it was you can up with the term "Michael Land not yours truly. I agree with you about that album--Michael needs to pick out better songs that are more of a match for his talents. He's got a real chance here--I hope he doesn't blow it!!!

Well, gotta run! See you all in 60!!!

Your obedient servant,



Carol Smith



## LAIRMAIL

Hi to all,

1992 has been Phantom-less for me so far. I am starting to have withdrawal symptoms and dire cravings to see the play again. Alas, financial situations make it unlikely for quite some time, so I'll have to content myself with memories and music, not to mention nostalgic perusals of all the programmes I've collected.

I was probably the first person in my town to snatch Michael performing the ALW music. I know that I'm not the only one, though. The second copy disappeared soon afterwards. I'd like to find out just who bought it. The two new copies of the CD are still in stock, so it seems like this town still needs to develop some good musical taste. Speaking of new musical acquisitions, a very nice friend in Australia sent me "Anthony Warlow - Centre Stage" recently. My, what a voice he has! My only complaint is just one Phantom song: MotN, of course. I wouldn't have minded the Phantom theme, but... He does great on everything, but personal favorites are "Luck be a Lady" (though Dave Willetts is my favorite performer of that song), "Somewhere," and "You're Nothing Without Me." Plus, for those of us who enjoy looking at our Phantoms (and who doesn't?), there's a very nice color fold-out type poster on the page with the listing of songs. I have heard that possibly Anthony will be going to London to be the Phantom there in the near future? If so, boy, would I like to see him!! I don't suppose any kind, rich souls out there would like to finance a trip to Merry Olde for me, would you?

Janice: Boy, it looks like Kevin Gray has really hooked you. I have to agree; he was extremely nice! I wish I could see some other Phantoms to compare my perfect Phantom Acts to. Davis Gaines seems to be making a splash, and see above about Anthony Warlow. Peter Karrie is also one I'd like to watch perform. If only wishes were pennies!

Heather: I have seen, via the small programme I got with the large nice one from Australia, a photo of what their paperback cover for Susan Kay's "Phantom" will look like. If it copies good enough, I'll try to enclose it. If not, I'll add on a brief description at the end of this. Speaking of the Aussie programme; it's a very nice one. Some typical photos like in all others, but some different ones too. And a small freebie-type one (like NY playbill) is enclosed too, mostly all covering Phantom, not various things like others do. I have copied the order form for this issue, because there are some things that, as far as I know, are not available here that some of you richer collectors might want. I'll quote what I was told in regards to ordering: "All prices quoted therein are in Australian Dollars, and the "P&H" (postage and handling charges) should be doubled for air mail despatch to the USA. Please send us with your order an International Money Order or a Bank Draft for the appropriate Aust.\$ amount." Or, if you're like me, you can get an Aussie friend to buy it for you and owe them the \$\$, thereby saving on the cost of international money orders or bank drafts. That friend is also keeping an eye peeled for the possible release of a soundtrack of the Australian production of Phantom. I hope; with Anthony Warlow, definitely!!

I guess that's all for now. Cheers.

Teresa



Dennis '91



Anthony Warlow

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the magic of  
the man behind  
the mask

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THE PASSIONATE STORY OF  
THE MAN BEHIND THE MASK  
SUSAN KAY



CORGI

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#### THE PHANTOM INVADES THE FOX

Dave Patrick Hayward

##### The Fox's Longest Run

One event that needs little notification involves the **Fox Theatre**: the mightily anticipated Atlanta debut of *The Phantom of the Opera*. Tickets are selling at unprecedented levels for the six-week run, and people from all over the South will be storming Atlanta to see the mother of all road shows, complete with crashing chandeliers, caverns of candelabra, and a tour through the Phantom's Venice of sewers. This magnum opus takes two weeks to set up.

The story about an elusive stowaway in Paris' Opera House and the luscious songbird he worships is a chip off the old *Beauty and the Beast* block, and the Andrew Lloyd Webber score won't give Stephen Sondheim jealous fits. What's lagging in art will be overshadowed by spectacle with the live equivalent of *Terminator 2* special effects and a rampantly romantic score. Broadway's Kevin Gray will recreate the Phantom in the Big Peach as he did in the Big Apple. As Christine, Teri Bibb has won rave revues in Washington as the wilting object of the Phantom's affections.



# The PHANTOM of the OPERA

S • H • O • P

All items are available from The Phantom of the Opera Shop in the foyer area of the Princess Theatre or by sending your mail order to the address overleaf.

For general enquiries please send stamped addressed envelope



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Heavyweight 100% Cotton Black T-Shirt with glow-in-the-dark Phantom Mask on the front, and shattered logo on back.

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S	M	L	XL	Total

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@ \$45.00 + \$3.00 P&H

S	M	L	XL	Total



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S	M	L	XL	Total



## JERSEY

Unbrushed 100% Cotton Black Fleecy Casual Jersey with finely embroidered white Phantom Mask on front. The ideal trans-seasonal garment.

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S	M	L	XL	Total

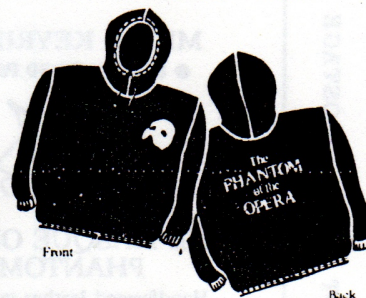


## SINGLET

100% Cotton Black Singlet with glow-in-the-dark Phantom Mask on the front, and shattered Phantom Cities on back.

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S	M	L	XL	Total



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Continued overleaf . . .



PI/081290



# 'The Phantom' takes the Fox

■ Spectacle, beyond the glitz and glitter of many Broadway shows, is what's drawing crowds to "The Phantom of the Opera." It is mystery and sensuality played on a grand scale.

By Elizabeth Lee

Daily News staff writer

**I**t's here. "The Phantom of the Opera," one of the hottest shows on Broadway and the most sought-after theater ticket in Atlanta, begins its six-week run tonight at the Fox Theatre.

The Andrew Lloyd Webber musical has filled seats at the Fox for much of its run, no easy feat considering that the cavernous theater holds 4,500 and the ticket prices — \$47.50 for the best seats on a weekend — are nearly double the price fetched by most touring shows.

One might well wonder what it is about the story of a deformed man's love for a young, aspiring opera singer that has drawn more than 14 million viewers to nearly 10,000 performances since "The Phantom of the Opera" first opened five years ago. Or what merited the seven Tony awards and the musical's reputation as a must-see for visitors to New York.

In a word: spectacle. But not the glitter and glitz that one might expect after seeing Lloyd Webber's musicals "Cats" and "Starlight Express." "Phantom" takes a more baroque approach with its visuals, recreating the lush atmosphere of the Paris Opera House right down to a massive chandelier and a subterranean lake.

The production will transform the Arabian Nights-themed Fox Theatre into a gilded, rococo version of the Paris Opera House in 19th-century splendor. The extravagant set of "Phantom," with its erotic elements and its shadow-filled crannies, aims to create an atmosphere of romance, menace and sensuality.

Visuals alone didn't make "Phantom" a runaway success, although the musical's sheer spectacle is what many reviewers have cited as its most exciting element.

"The show's beauty and the show's romance appeal to people," says Kevin Gray, who plays the Phantom in the touring version of the show. "We live in a world where most of what's considered romantic is quite explicit. Despite all of our production values and stunts, we rely largely on the imagination, which is more sensual than anything we can create."

And maybe, Gray thinks, the audience also identifies with the Phantom.

"The Phantom is a man who, because of his deformity, feels that he's not good enough and not acceptable to the world," Gray says. "I don't think there's anyone around anywhere who can honestly say they're completely right in every sense. We all feel we're not good enough in some way, intellectually, physically, sexually, spiritually, we're always looking at other people



Kevin Gray plays the Phantom, a deformed man in love with a young, aspiring opera singer, Christine, played by Teri Bibb.

and thinking, 'That's better than this.'"

Gray talked about playing the Phantom from Washington, D.C., where the musical recently ended a four-month run. He played the Phantom briefly on Broadway, and for a year held the role of Raoul, the Viconte who entices the aspiring soprano, Christine, away from the Phantom.

"Phantom" is on a 10-city tour. After its Atlanta stopover the musical travels to Denver, then Philadelphia and Boston.

The traveling version, like the London and Broadway stagings, is directed by Hal Prince. Prince and Lloyd Webber last collaborated on "Evita." "Phantom" is produced by Cameron Mackintosh ("Les Misérables," "Cats" and "Miss Saigon").

The staging at the Fox contains the same elements seen on Broadway, but there is one factor at the Fox that demands adjustments from the cast: the size of the theater. The Fox, with 4,500 seats, is one-and-a-half times the size of the largest venue in which the touring company has performed.

"There's no question that we'll have to broaden the performance to a certain extent to compensate for the house," Gray says. "We're aware the house is extremely large and the people in the back have every expectation of seeing the show the same as

the people in the front do."

Gray, who has performed at the Fox before, playing Luntha in a traveling production of "The King and I" with Stacy Keach, jokes about giving private renditions in the balconies of the theater to make sure everyone gets an up-close look at the Phantom. Maybe they could hang up video screens like one sees at rock concerts, an interviewer suggests.

"I hope not," Gray says, laughing at the

idea of what he dubs "arena Phantom."

The show's visual elements and spectacles do make the comparison with elaborate rock shows a little less implausible. And as is typical for eagerly awaited concerts and musicals, expectations about "Phantom" are running high in Atlanta.

"I don't want expectation to get any greater than it already is, but I think the show lives up to it in terms of its majesty," Gray says.

## IF YOU'RE GOING



**Getting there:** The Fox Theatre is located at 660 Peachtree St. The MARTA stop is North Avenue.

**Do:** Get tickets as soon as possible if you plan to go. Demand is high; the best ticket availability is in the final two weeks of the run, which ends Nov. 16. Tickets range from \$22.50-\$47.50, and are available at the Fox box office and Ticketmaster, or to charge at 249-6400 or 359-2525.

**Don't:** Forget to bring extra money for souvenirs.





Maturity News Service

Kevin Gray as the Phantom and Teri Bibb as Christine in the national touring company production of the grandiose musical "The Phantom of the Opera."

## 'Phantom' a solid tour hit

\$10 million production a spectacle of lighting, set

By Gwen Gibson  
Maturity News Service

When the curtain goes up on the \$10 million national touring production of "The Phantom of the Opera," it is immediately clear that this is no scaled-down version of the London and Broadway shows.

Indeed, there are enough props and special effects in the traveling "Phantom" to give new meaning to the term stage fright.

Included are a  $\frac{3}{4}$ -ton chandelier decked with 35,000 beads (which descends to the stage at the end of Act One); a  $2\frac{1}{2}$ -ton staircase; more than 500 pounds of dry ice, per performance; a gilded proscenium arch with sensuous sculptures; and a gondola floating on a candlelit sea.

Also, there are ingenious depictions of the old Paris Opera House — from its roof to the phantom's subterranean digs. Plus layers and layers of curtains, as well as hundreds of candles, costumes, electronic and incendiary devices, a sarcophagus and one elephant.

The national touring version of Andrew Lloyd Webber's spectacular musical opened in June at the Kennedy Center, with the president and first lady in the audience. Promoters say it is booked through 1993 in major cities across the country — including Atlanta, Boston and Denver.

The touring cast of 36 singers and dancers (plus orchestra and scores of crew members) is ably headed by Kevin Gray as Eric, the seductive, disfigured phantom; Teri Bibb as the ingenue he hopes to seduce; and Keith Buterbaugh as her other very handsome suitor, Raoul.

But the lavish settings by designer Maria Bjornson and the velvety lighting by Andrew Bridge are

the real stars of this opulent show.

Webber's musical is based on the Gothic romance novel, "Le Fantome de l'Opera," written in 1910 by a globe-trotting French journalist, Gaston Leroux, who needed some fast money to pay off his debts. Leroux insisted in his prologue that a "flesh and blood" phantom actually existed at the turn of the century in the magnificent Paris Opera House — causing all sorts of mischief because of his love for a lovely young singer.

His ghost story spawned a series of movies and television shows over the years.

The 1925 silent movie version of "The Phantom of the Opera" starred actor Lon Chaney as a macabre and frightening ghost. Claude Rains was a more subdued specter in the 1943 "talking" movie version. Actor Herbert Lom made the phantom eerie again in the 1962 British film. Television renderings of "The Phantom of the Opera" starred Maximilian Schell in 1983 and Charles Dance in 1990.

Webber's grand-scale musical adheres pretty much to the original storyline about the deformed and masked musical genius who lives beneath the Opera House and frightens the theater management into starring his love, Christine, in a bizarre opera he has composed.

You know from the start that the phantom doesn't stand a chance with his love, but Webber's melodic music, the glorious voices of the members of the cast and the phantasmagorical staging carry the show eloquently through its weak plot.

If you like fun and fantasy on a spectacular scale, the touring "Phantom" is worth a stiff price of admission. For example, tickets ran \$27.50 to \$55 at the Kennedy Center, with some special discounts for groups and seniors.